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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001366

DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG, AF/C
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ASEC PGOV PREL KPKO AU UNSC SU
SUBJECT: HEAVY FIGHTING REPORTED IN NORTH DARFUR

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On September 6 and 7, multiple UNAMID, rebel, and civil society leaders separately contacted poloffs and reported intense fighting between rebel and GoS forces near Birmaza, North Darfur. (Note: According to UN maps, Birmaza is located approximately 50 kilometers north of Kutum with a latitude of 14 39' and a longitude of 24 35'.) One rebel in the field claimed that the GoS force extensively bombed the area before an integrated SAF-janjaweed force stormed the area with over 120 vehicles and many more men riding horseback and camels. UNDSS sources said early, unconfirmed reports indicate that the attack resulted in many civilian deaths, a large civilian displacement, and the destruction of Birmaza and Diza. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On September 7, UNDSS sources confirmed to poloff that the SAF, supported by janjaweed attacked SLA positions yesterday, allegedly destroying much of Birmaza and Diza and killing many civilians. According to this source, the injured have not yet been evacuated, and fighting is ongoing. UNDSS sources also said that there are unconfirmed rumors Justice and Equality Movement may be deploying from Chad to support a broad attack in coordination with other rebel movements (such rumors have ubiquitous for weeks though).

¶3. (SBU) On September 6, at approximately 22:00 local time Senior Presidential Assistant and SLM Chairman Minni Minnawi sent a text message to poloff stating that SAF attacked and displaced many civilians in and around Birmaza. El-Fasher resident and Fur activist, Abdullah Adam Bashar Adam also separately contacted poloff and stated that his Fur contacts informed him of a "wide military operation in North Darfur." Like Minnawi Bashar stated that there was "mass displacement" resulting from these GoS attacks. (Note: Neither Minnawi nor Bashar have been available for recontact on September 7.)

¶4. (SBU) On September 7, Bahar Idriss Abu Gharba of the United Resistance Front told poloff that SLA-Unity and URF had defeated the government and janjaweed forces who attacked Disa. He added that at 10:30 local time on September 7, the government attacked rebel positions and more fighting broke out in South Darfur east of Jebel Marra. When queried why each of these areas had been targeted, Abu Gharba said he believes the government is launching a campaign against rebel positions throughout Darfur, and speculated that after the rainy season they would extend the campaign into Chad. Abu Gharba stated that he believes that the GoS is attempting to solve the problems in Darfur militarily in the wake of the ICC indictment of President Bashir. He could not answer definitively on the number of casualties.

¶5. (SBU) Also on September 7, a statement attributed to URF and SLM/Unity appeared on the website sudaneseonline.com. The statement claims that rebels repelled a joint janjaweed attack in Birmaza and Om Maraheek. Unity and URF claimed in the statement that they destroyed 23 GoS armed vehicles (out of a total of 60) and killed 93

camels and horses, along with capturing 12 SAF officers and 18 other soldiers.

¶6. (SBU) Mustafa Ibrahim, an SLM field commander, also separately told poloff that the GoS bombing of the area around Birmaza was ongoing as of 12:00 noon on September 7. Ibrahim stated that the GoS forces used over 120 vehicles in the attack. According to Ibrahim, the Birmaza area is highly populated, filled with markets, and vital to the people. "If the GoS controls this area, they control the people," noted Ibrahim. Ibrahim claimed that janjaweed "taken from Kabkabiya" had been integrated into the GoS force for this attack. Ibrahim downplayed reports of rebels capturing GoS soldiers, adding that most of the GoS forces had retreated following the strong rebel defense.

¶7. (SBU) Also on September 7, URFF leader Alhadi Adam Agabeldour wrote poloffs. (Note: Contact provided unconventional spelling of his name and will be repeated as written. End Note.) According to Agabeldour, the Government of Sudan recently established a new militia in Darfur which has now been employed in the reported attack on Birmaza. Agabeldour stated that the leader of the militia is Major General Madani Badawi supported by other militia commanders including: Mohamed Hamdan Dagallow (the Rizeigat Arab militia commander known as "Hamati"), Mustafa Shareif Mousa, Omar Sabile, Alhadi Al mahadi Ahamed, Al Nour Ahmed, Yousif Abdullah Hamad, Abdulrahim Mohamed Holi, Ibrahim Mousa Shareif. Agabeldour also stated that some members of this militia were sent to a well-known GoS training facilities in Eastern Sudan, near Port Sudan.

¶8. COMMENT: Heavy fighting occurred on September 6 and 7, though the details of exactly which rebel groups, the motive for the

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attack, and the numbers and composition of dead and wounded all remain unclear. Some analysts have noted that the area under question was presumably under SLM/Minnawi control. Post will continue to contact SLM/MM representatives for more details and to discover whether there was any direct combat between SLM/MM commanders and SAF forces. While the regime has downplayed the fighting, some of the rebel claims - in terms of SAF casualties - also may be exaggerated. The most controversial, and least clear, element is the extent of civilian casualties.

FERNANDEZ